



INDEPENDENT SCHOLARS ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA Inc

NSW Chapter

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Dear Members,

Long term ISAA NSW Member Sybil Jack (Sybil Milliner Jack-Ungar) received an OAM for services to education in the Australia Day Honours this year. Sybil has been Treasurer for ISAA NSW and contributed to ISAA publications over many years. Sybil is an historian and a former Dean of Arts at Sydney University. She was actively involved in the field of Celtic Studies. In December it was a pleasure that Sybil was able to join us for our 2025 Christmas lunch.

Another long-term member, Harding Burns, turned 101 in February. Congratulations Harding! The Burns family joined ISAA's NSW Chapter from its inception in the mid 1990s and his sister Jane Burns served for many years on ISAA's National Council and the NSW Committee, and Maggie (Burns) McDonald was ISAA NSW's Treasurer for some years. She and her husband, John, hosted many Work-in-Progress meetings at their home.

Those were the days when ISAA was thriving in NSW and the Library was also able to provide us with meeting rooms and jointly host seminars. You will notice that we now have to hire rooms from other providers for our in-person meetings, so the suggested donation is now \$10 for those attending (rather than the traditional \$5).

We have a new member Dwayne Byrnes, about whom I have yet to be provided with additional information. He was introduced to ISAA by Aedeon Cremin. Welcome Dwayne. Sadly, on Monday 4 May, Dr Marie de Lepervanche passed away. Marie was an anthropologist well known for her research on Indians in Woolgoolga and she was a staunch feminist. She was a very long-term member of ISAA and there will be a Vale for her in the next ISAA *National Newsletter*.

If you have any contributions for the next *Bulletin*, such as scholarly book notes, notes on exhibitions, films or plays, or interesting snippets of research, please send them to me by **19 June 2026** at: cjennett@ozemail.com.au.

Christine Jennett, *Bulletin* Editor

NSW Chapter ISAA

Executive members

Chair: Christine Yeats FRAHS

Vice-Chair:

Secretary:

Treasurer: Dr Rodney Nillsen

Immediate Past Chair: Dr

Christine Jennett

Committee Members:

Dr Lesley Potter

Dr Judith Bonzol

Dr Alice Paul

Dr Susan Steggall

Michelle Cavanagh

Library Liaison:

Christine Yeats

Dates for Your Diary

27 May: Public Affairs Reading
Group

25 June: Biography Reading
group

10 July: Work-in-Progress
Meeting 2

29 July: Public Affairs Reading
Group

27 August: Biography Reading
Group

2 October: Work-in-Progress
Meeting 3

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Our Annual General Meeting was held on Thursday 7 May on Zoom. Below are the results of the election of the Committee members. There being fewer nominees than positions vacant, the following people were declared elected unopposed:

Chair – Christine Yeats

Committee member – Lesley Potter

Committee member – Alice Paul

Committee member – Michelle Cavanagh

Committee and website – Susan Steggall

Continuing in this position:

Treasurer - Rodney Nilsen

Immediate Past Chair: Christine Jennett

Committee member – Judith Bonzol

Positions remaining vacant:

Vice Chair – no nomination

Secretary – no nomination

If you are interested to contribute to the work of the Committee as Vice Chair or Secretary please contact cjennett@ozemail.com.au or ciyeats@gmail.com.au (but she will be overseas for the rest of May)

UPCOMING EVENTS

WORK IN PROGRESS MEETING

Friday 10 July 2026

11 – 12.30 pm

Honeysuckle Room

Floor 5, 222 Pitt Street

Donation \$10 (contribution to room hire)



Speaker: Dr Judith Bonzol

Topic: *Non-conformist Scottish clerics in early seventeenth-century Bermuda and the beginnings of Presbyterianism in the New World*

Abstract

Presbyterianism in Bermuda emerged from a diverse early seventeenth-century Puritan presence that gradually consolidated into an explicitly Presbyterian congregation in the early eighteenth century. The present Christ Church in Warwick traces its origins to 1719, when it formally aligned with the Church of Scotland. It is now recognised as the first organised Presbyterian church in Bermuda and among the oldest continuous Presbyterian congregations in the New World.

My research centres on an anonymous letter written around 1629–30 that recounts the demonic possession, and subsequent dispossession through prayer and fasting, of a fourteen-year-old apprentice in Bermuda. Two Scottish ministers, uneasy within the strictly episcopal Church of England, participated in this unsanctioned act, which contravened the Church Canons of 1604 forbidding exorcism. I argue that one of these clerics, George Stirk, a Calvinist who settled in Bermuda in 1622, was the likely author. On this small and remote colony, distant from direct ecclesiastical control, ministers such as Stirk, supported by Puritan shareholders in the Somers Islands Company, could powerfully assert the spiritual legitimacy of nonconformist practices.

Because of Bermuda's distinctive Scottish and Presbyterian influences, my wider study explores the role of Scottish nonconformist clergy in the colony during the early seventeenth century. This investigation also considers the Virginia Company's larger strategy of transporting parish-indentured children to the colonies to bolster the workforce and advance the Puritan cause. By the 1640s, escalating religious tensions from England reached Bermuda, where Presbyterians and Independents clashed fiercely over ecclesiastical authority and control of the islands.

About the speaker

Judith Bonzol is a Research Affiliate in the School of Humanities at the University of Sydney. She completed her PhD thesis, *'The other sort of witches': Cunning Folk and Supernatural Illness in Early Modern England*, in the History Department at the University of Sydney in 2011. Publications include: "A True Narrative of the Grievous Affliction of Roger Sterrop in Somer Islands": Demonic Possession and the Puritan Project in Early Seventeenth-Century Bermuda', in *Monsters and Borders in the Early Modern Imagination* (Routledge, 2018); 'The Medical Diagnosis of Demonic Possession in an Early Modern English Community', *Parergon* 26, 1 (2009); 'Afflicted Children: Supernatural Illness, Fear, and Anxiety in Early Modern England', in *Diseases of the Imagination and Imaginary Diseases in the Early Modern Period*, ed Yasmin Haskell (Brepols, 2011); "In good reporte and honest estimacion amongst her neighbours": Cunning Women in the Star Chamber and on the Stage in Early Modern England', in *Magical Transformations on the Early Modern English Stage*, eds. Lisa Hopkins and Helen Ostovich (Ashgate, 2014). Judith is a former librarian and is a NSW ISAA Committee member.



RECENT EVENT

WORK IN PROGRESS MEETING

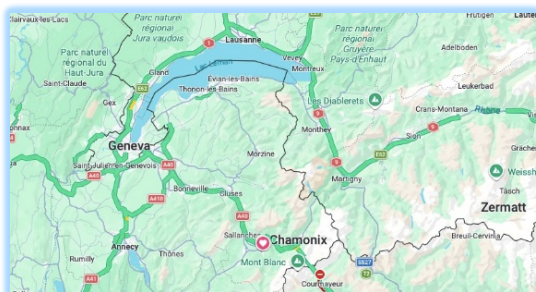
27 February 2026

Cosy Mystery meets Eco-Lit: a work-in-progress

If climate-change discourse is so dominated by scientists and policymakers that 'lay' citizens believe they lack the required specialist knowledge, might fiction provide another way in? Deborah Jordan's, *Climate Change Narratives in Australian Fiction* (LAP LAMBERT Academic Publishing Saarbrücken, 2014) is a reference point.

In the Work-in-Progress session I presented ideas on introducing climate change into fiction, without plunging into either dystopian or utopian scenarios, by combining 'cosy mystery' with eco-literature. Cosy mysteries typically feature amateur sleuths, off-stage violence, minimal profanity, and puzzle-solving, with an often predictable, but satisfying conclusion. Eco-lit foregrounds environmental crises, biodiversity loss and habitat destruction. I do not want to write about either wasteland apocalypses or idealised green futures but about recognisable landscapes under pressure and human responses to those pressures.

I gained a B Pharm and M Science at the University of Sydney in the 1960s, and then worked in medical departments in pharmaceutical companies before moving with my family to Haute-Savoie in the French Alps in 1978, where we lived for a decade. That region and its culture remain the imaginative impetus for much of my fiction. After returning to Sydney, I studied art theory and history at COFA (UNSW Art & Design) and completed a PhD on art and architectural historian Joan Kerr before venturing into fiction. My early novels, set in the French Alps and Provence, involve art-world intrigue and the tragic consequences of two world wars.



Haute-Savoie (74)



Le Var (83)

My manuscript, *A Network of Spiders*, takes place in the French department of Haute-Savoie and the Swiss Alps, with a bi-lingual couple as protagonists. It begins as a light-hearted mystery involving the theft of a spider sculpture by Louise Bourgeois but develops into an exposé of forest degradation. An alpine superstorm provides a dramatic climax. In my follow-on manuscript, the environmental focus shifts from forests and storms to the health of river systems. The Franco-Australian couple's daughter, Magali, is the main protagonist. An idealistic environmental scientist, she is to conduct fieldwork along a tributary of the Dranse River, which flows into Lake Geneva near Thonon-les-Bains. In a training video Magali glimpses earth-moving equipment clearing land in a protected alpine zone. When she rewatches the footage, the scene has vanished. Soon after, a colleague mysteriously disappears. To be continued...

Several aims: to make Magali strongly climate-aware without preaching to readers; highlight environmental degradation while maintaining the precepts of a cosy mystery, and reference events from the previous story without retelling them. There is also the challenge of engaging Australian readers and publishers in settings far from our shores.

I often 'see' the ending before I know how to get there – an uncertainty that contributes to the delight and frustration of writing. **Susan Steggall**



BOOK NOTES

Public Affairs Reading Group Discussion

29 April 2026

This is for Everyone: The Invention of the World Wide Web (365 pp)

Tim Berners-Lee, Macmillan, 2025

ISBN 978-1-0350-2368-4

The themes of the book can be grouped as: the history of the development of the web since about 1990, social issues arising from the rise of web usage, and ideas and proposed solutions for the identified issues. There is a good index but there are no references. The technical aspects of the book are potentially demanding for the general reader, depending on background knowledge. The book would have benefitted from an acronyms list, a glossary of technical terms, and a timeline. It is loosely structured and

is aimed at a wide audience, and endeavours to cater for those interested in the technicalities of the development of the web and those concerned with associated social effects.

The author, Tim Berners-Lee says an aim in development of the web was to 'give individual freedom to users'. He sees initially that this is beneficial to democracy but goes on to ask 'how intertwined were democracy and technology anyway? Did they necessarily grow in concert? My assumption had always been yes', but he comes to realise 'you had to develop technology and society together'. He does not elaborate on this necessity in any adequate way. There are unresolved swings from enthusiasm and optimism about the web and its future, to pessimism about how it has developed and the social issues needing to be addressed. Thus, on the one hand he says: 'It [the web] was like giving everyone their own printing press, ... To me that *had* to be a good thing. I believed and still believe in the emancipatory power of the internet'. However, on the other hand, when he comes to the social consequences arising from the web he says: 'until the [polarisation and mental health] problems are fixed, it will be hard ... to think about the web in a positive light'.

There is a certain irony in the 'feel-good' title of the book, in that many of the social issues that Berners-Lee acknowledges have arisen from the web, derive from the fact that the web is indeed for 'everyone', more-or-less. It is the unlimited 'individual freedom of users' and of the unaccountable commercial providers of web platforms that are the basic cause of the social issues he identifies. Berners-Lee comes across as well-intentioned and he is to be credited with making the web far more accessible than it might have been. The technical analysis is informative and knowledgeable (as one would expect), but the discussion of the social issues is superficial, naïve in parts, and lacks analytical depth. In the long run, it seems, we should not worry about AI or anything else, as technology will right itself if only the experts are left alone to get on with it. **Rodney Nilsen**



BIOGRAPHY READING GROUP

The Invisible Woman: The Story of Nelly Ternan and Charles Dickens

Claire Tomalin

1990, 2012 Vintage; 1991, 2004 Penguin

Claire Tomalin's *The Invisible Woman: The Story of Nelly Ternan and Charles Dickens*, first published in 1990 and awarded two major British literary prizes, is a distinguished example of biographical recovery. Long interested in women's lives and neglected historical subjects, Tomalin seeks to bring women into the foreground of history, and she does so here with restraint, sympathy, and considerable force. Her subject is Ellen, or Nelly, Lawless Ternan, who has survived in the Dickensian archive chiefly as rumour, complication, or silence.

Tomalin's achievement lies in the delicacy with which she reconstructs a relationship that was deliberately obscured by Dickens, his family, his friends, and later descendants. She argues convincingly that Ternan's disappearance from the record was not accidental but the result of sustained suppression. Because direct documentation, especially correspondence, is sparse, she works from indirect evidence: diaries, addresses, financial records, theatre archives, and later testimony. What gives the book its authority is her scrupulous attention to the limits of this material. She distinguishes carefully between fact and inference, and even in her more speculative passages, including the reconstruction of Dickens's final day, she avoids sensationalism.

One of the book's principal strengths is its understanding of Dickens not only as a novelist, but as a public figure whose authority depended on reputation. Tomalin shows how his image as a moral exemplar, philanthropist, and social reformer was carefully sustained through the management of his domestic life. The concealment of Ternan, together with the handling of his separation from his wife

Catherine, was central to preserving a persona grounded in respectability and benevolence. Later work on Catherine Dickens's letters has strengthened this argument, confirming both the severity of Dickens's treatment of his wife and the family's efforts to control the narrative.

Tomalin is equally effective in keeping Ternan at the centre of the narrative despite the paucity of surviving evidence. Her reconstruction of the theatrical world into which Ternan was born is especially valuable, since it highlights the precarious economic and social conditions under which Victorian actresses lived. Her treatment of Nelly's sisters and of Ternan's later life after Dickens's death further enriches the biography, giving historical substance to a marginalised figure.

The book also corrects attempts to minimise the relationship or to portray Ternan in disparaging terms. Tomalin rejects the evasions of earlier biographers and the harsher judgments of critics such as Edmund Wilson. She stresses instead the strain involved in sustaining the fiction of a merely platonic attachment and gives weight to the testimony of Dickens's older children, who identified Ternan as their father's mistress and referred to a child who died.

The enduring value of *The Invisible Woman* lies in its restoration of Ternan as a historical presence and in its demonstration that gender, reputation, and Victorian respectability profoundly distorted the archival record. By placing erasure at the centre of the story, Tomalin recovers not only a life, but also the mechanisms by which Dickens's moral authority was constructed and maintained. **Judith Bonzol**

Mary Booth: The Woman who Shaped the Anzac Legend

Bruce Scates & Raelene Frances

The Miegunyah Press, 2026

ISBN-13:9780522880717

ISBN-10: 0522880711

The recently published biography *Mary Booth: The Woman Who Shaped the Anzac Legend* By Bruce Scates and Raelene Frances is an outstanding example of biographical writing. Bruce Scates was awarded the NSW History Fellowship in 1999 to research a biography of Mary Booth and a history of post-war commemoration. The project was shelved after two years because, despite the abundance of official submissions and organisational records connected with Booth, the author felt they could not hear Mary's own voice clearly enough to sustain a meaningful biography.

In the decades since, new resources opened up possibilities for the project. The digitisation of newspapers through Trove, the extensive 'Booth boxes' preserved in the State Library of New South Wales and the National Library of Australia, and the unexpected discovery of Booth's personal letters to her friend Agnes Bennett all provided fresh insight. These letters, in particular, revealed dimensions of Booth's character that had long remained hidden behind her public image.

Dr Mary Booth (1869–1956) emerges from the biography as a deeply complex and often contradictory figure. A pioneering feminist and committed nationalist, she was at the same time a conservative imperial loyalist. Her interests ranged across infant welfare, eugenics, war remembrance and environmental reform. She also strongly supported the Dreadnought Scheme. Between 1911 and 1939 it brought more than 5,500 British boys to NSW as rural labour apprentices.

Born in Burwood, Sydney, Booth was the eldest child of a schoolmaster and benefited from a rigorous education. She completed a Bachelor of Arts at the University of Sydney in 1890 and was governess for the NSW Governor, the Earl of Jersey's children. A family inheritance enabled her to pursue medicine. After initial studies in Melbourne, she enrolled at the College of Medicine for Women at the University of Edinburgh, graduating in 1899. Returning to Sydney the following year, she established a private practice, although medicine would never become the central focus of her career.

Booth was influential in the development of school medical services in Victoria and contributed to medical journals and publications. She was also an advocate for women, helping establish The Women's Club in Sydney and playing an active role in the National Council of Women of New South Wales.

During the First World War, Booth devoted herself to patriotic and welfare work. She established the Babies' Kit Society and the Soldiers' Club, while also organising support for soldiers' families. In recognition of this work, she was appointed an Officer of the Order of the British Empire in 1918. Although her political ambitions were unsuccessful, she remained an important public figure.

In the post-war years, Booth concentrated much of her attention on preserving and promoting the Anzac tradition. In 1921 she founded the Anzac Fellowship of Women. She was also active in immigration advocacy, particularly for British migrants, and established organisations supporting returned servicewomen and young male settlers. Her interests extended to urban planning and international reform movements, especially campaigns aimed at improving family living conditions. **Christine Yeats**



ART NOTE

Otherworldly Glimpses

While in Japan last year to study woodfired ceramics our group also visited artists who live within Kyoto's urban conglomerate and who are no longer allowed to use anagama kilns because of the risks of atmospheric pollution. I include here two such artists from very different generations and traditions.

Kimura Moriyasu, a sprightly ninety-year-old, has been working with the tenmoku process for seven decades. Tenmoku is a high-temperature ceramic glaze known for its dark brown to black, high-gloss surfaces streaked with the colours one sees in photographs of deep space. In daylight his luminous tea bowls come to life as both landscape and cosmos, revealing hidden depths in unusual colour combinations: ochre, sienna and iridescent blues – from sea-bright turquoise to the ultramarine of the midnight sky. Kimura Moriyasu is represented in prestigious institutions, both nationally and internationally, and one might think he could now rest on his laurels. Not so. He insisted he has just scratched the surface of tenmoku glaze mysteries. His only concession to age is that he now works with an electric kiln and sources his clay and glazes commercially (especially those containing iron-rich minerals). See: <https://www.moco.or.jp/en/exhibition/past/?e=560>.



Kimura Moriyasu
Bowl c.15 cm diameter



Machiko Hashimoto
Vase c.15 cm length



Machiko Hashimoto
dish, c. 13 x 7 cm

(Photographs: Susan Steggall)

Born in 1986 in Kyoto Prefecture, Machiko Hashimoto graduated from the Department of Fine Arts at Kyoto Saga University of Arts Junior College in 2007, then from the Advanced Course in Fine Arts at the same institution. Machiko is represented in the prestigious exhibition and book *Radical Clay. Contemporary Women Artists from Japan* (Art Institute, Chicago, 2024).

On the lustrous white surfaces of her bowls, vases, cups and small platters Machiko Hashimoto 'paints' intense sapphire-blue miniature landscapes— a mountain range, boulder-filled streams and pine forests (or are they flowers?). She begins with clay slabs which she then shapes and moulds by hand. Her earlier work had a fragile, brittle quality but the pieces we saw in her studio were softer, chunkier, eminently

approachable and tactile. The characteristic blue in Hashimoto's works evokes sky, sea, and water – elements that are integral to the wellspring of life. Her gleaming rounded ceramics, both robust and delicate, capture fleeting glimpses of a compelling yet elusive nature ('Machiko Hashimoto: Blue. Cycle of life', https://sokyogallery.com/press_release_text). **Susan Steggall**



Report on the Mitchell Library Consultative Committee Meeting, 4 March 2026

1. 200th anniversary of the State Library

Richard Neville observed that the 200th anniversary provides an opportunity to reflect on what libraries mean for the community – and First Nations people in particular – and the connections they have to the State Library collection. He also referred to the 200th anniversary publication – *The Library That Made Me: 200 Years of the State Library of NSW*, which he wrote and which was edited by Phillipa McGuinness – published in March 2026. The book features 59 essays from prominent Australians reflecting on libraries that shaped them, alongside history, photography, and personal stories celebrating the role of libraries in NSW communities. The book was launched at the official function to mark the anniversary on 20 February.

200th anniversary celebration events are listed on the Library's website.

2. Macquarie Street Wing update

There was a report on the refurbishment of the Macquarie Street Wing, including the Dame Marie Bashir Reading Room. Richard explained that use of the reading room will move to a different model based on 'trust' where there will be no need for readers to deposit bags/cases in the lockers. Access will be easier as the lifts will go LG2, which is more heavily used. The upgraded space will provide 30% more seating on LG2; more study rooms and improved technology in the study rooms.

3. Freedom to Collect Act NSW

The *Library Amendment (Freedom to Collect) Bill 2026* was introduced into the NSW Parliament on 5 February 2026. It amends the Library Act 1939 in NSW and aims to strengthen public libraries' rights to curate diverse collections. It authorises local libraries to freely collect material and directly counters attempts by individuals or groups to limit the scope of, or remove items from, public library collections.

4. Special Collections

Richard outlined the new internal processes being implemented to better manage the understanding of the usage and usage patterns of this material.

5. Review of the reference collection

There will be a review of the reference collection to identify out-of-date material, gaps in the collections and online equivalents. Material that is not being used will be removed from the reference shelves and moved to the stacks.

6. Ask a Librarian service

Upgrades to the Ask a Librarian service are underway behind the scenes. The service will move to a new Customer Relationship Management (CRN) system to manage requests for information. A CRN system aims to enhance 'interactions between libraries, patrons, and other stakeholders'. It will go online in a couple of months.

7. Access to Electoral Rolls

Electoral Rolls will only be available up to 1980.

8. Other news

Exhibitions: A major retrospective of iconic Australian photographer Max Dupain is scheduled to be held at the State Library in August 2026; Merv Bishop [photographer] Exhibition 18 October 2025 – 7 February 2027; Lorrie Graham (photographer) exhibition opening in September 2026.

New acquisition – Sir Henry Parkes Correspondence.

The next update meeting is scheduled for mid-2026.

Christine Yeats



READING GROUP MEETINGS FOR 2026

BIOGRAPHY GROUP

This meeting will be by Zoom and we plan on Zoom meetings for the remainder of the year, in April, June, August and October, starting at 2 pm. Our books in turn for those months:

Thursday 25 June: *Elizabeth Harrower: The Woman in the Watch Tower* by Susan Wyndham, 2025, New South, 336pp.

Thursday 27 August: *Doc Evatt: The Brilliant Boy – Doc Evatt and the Great Australian Dissent*, by Gideon Haigh, 2022, 384pp.

Thursday 29 October: *This House of Grief* by Helen Garner, 2014, 288pp.

If you are interested in joining us please contact the Convenor Alice Paul on: acpnsw6@gmail.com

PUBLIC AFFAIRS READING GROUP

Please see below for the programme of our Zoom meetings for 2026, each starting at 3 pm, with dates and books below:

Wednesday 27 May: Henry Reynold's *Looking from the North: Australian History from Top Down* (2025).

Wednesday 29 July: Nancy Pelsosi's *The Art of Power: My Story as America's First Woman Speaker of the House* (2024).

Wednesday 30 September: Sean Kelly's 'The Good Fight – What does Labor Stand For', *Quarterly Essay*, Issue 100, (Nov. 2025).

Wednesday 25 November: Rory Stewart's *Politics on the Edge: A Memoir from within* (UK) (2024)

If you are interested in joining the group please contact the Convenor Christine Jennett on cjennett@ozemail.com.au.

Verbalising Can Clarify

Do you wonder what other people might think of your ideas?

Tired of keeping them to yourself?

Want some genuine, helpful, and considered discussion of *your* work-in-progress?

If an ISAA Work-in-Progress meeting interests you, please contact:

cjennett@ozemail.com.au

Book Notes Exhibition Notes Film Notes

Research Snippets

If you have read a book, seen an exhibition or a film of substance lately or come across a snippet of interesting research that you would like to share with fellow ISAA members send in a piece (up to 300 words) containing its key insights and arguments to: cjennett@ozemail.com.au.